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REVIEW OF SECTORAL CLUSTER: LAND, DESERTIFICATION, FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY

Statement of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Note by the Secretariat

In its decision I/8, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which held its first session at Nassau from 28 November to 9 December 1994, decided to invite its President to transmit a statement to the high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session. The statement is annexed to the present note.

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Annex

STATEMENT FROM THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY TO THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT ITS THIRD SESSION

1. The planet's essential goods, ecological functions and services depend on the variety and variability of genes, species, populations and ecosystems. If humanity is to have a future on this earth, biological diversity must be conserved so that these functions and services are maintained. The current decline in biodiversity is largely the result of human activity and represents a serious threat to human development. Despite efforts to conserve the world's biological diversity, its depletion has continued. The entry into force of the Convention provides an international framework through which to address this depletion which causes threats to ecosystems that are vital for the sustenance of human societies in all countries. By becoming parties to the Convention, Governments have committed themselves to the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

2. The Convention on Biological Diversity is the primary international legal instrument for advancing the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources, while recognizing the important role of other conventions to the objectives of the Convention.

3. The Convention was opened for signature during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Since then the Convention has received 168 signatures. It entered into force on 29 December 1993, and has been ratified or acceded to by 105 States and the European Community at the time of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

4. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held its first meeting at Nassau, from 28 November to 9 December 1994, at which it took a number of decisions and adopted a medium-term programme of work for the period 1995 to 1997.

5. The above information is conveyed to the Commission on Sustainable Development in the light of the recommendation contained in paragraph 38.13 (f) of Agenda 21.

6. The Conference of the Parties is vested with the responsibility of implementing the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity, of reviewing the further development of matters relating to the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and, where appropriate, of bringing these within the purview of the Convention. In this context, the Conference of the Parties seeks to establish links with other bodies and processes relevant to biodiversity issues, with a view to promoting coherent and urgent attention to these issues.

7. The Conference of the Parties attaches importance to the development of a substantive relationship with the Commission on Sustainable Development, given the Commission's responsibilities in respect of Agenda 21 and the complementarity of its mandate with that of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

8. At its first meeting, the Conference of the Parties was pervaded by a sense of urgency and an awareness of the magnitude of the task before it. The Conference of the Parties appeals to the Commission on Sustainable Development to make all efforts in its own right to advance the concerns of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

9. The Convention leaves no doubt that biological diversity is a cross-cutting issue. The provisions of the Convention are of the utmost relevance to the issues to be reviewed by the Commission at its third session; to the planning and management of land resources, combating deforestation, managing fragile ecosystems and promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development. Many aspects of the programme areas to be considered by the Commission, their bases for action, objectives, activities and means of implementation correspond to the objectives and provisions of the Convention.

10. The Convention ushers in a new era concerning access to genetic resources which is subject to the provisions of Article 15 of the Convention and is characterized by a fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of such resources.

11. The Conference of the Parties was informed of the ongoing negotiations under the auspices of FAO to bring the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Conference of the Parties recognizes this process and hopes that these negotiations will come to a meaningful conclusion. The Commission on Sustainable Development may wish to convey this message to FAO and to advise it on the intention of the Conference of the Parties to consider the issue of access to genetic resources at its second and third meetings. In this regard, it would be desirable to coordinate efforts carried out in both fora in order to collaborate and to avoid overlapping in the respective fields of competence of FAO and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

12. The provisions of the Convention are also relevant to the cross-sectoral cluster and should be considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development when it reviews critical elements of sustainability, as indicated in Agenda 21. The Conference of the Parties notes in particular the relevance of the following cross-sectoral issues on the agenda of the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development: Chapters 3, Combating poverty; 5, Demographic dynamics and sustainability; 8, Integrating environment and development in decision-making; 16, Environmentally sound management of biotechnology; 23-32, Roles of major groups; 33, Financial resources and mechanisms; 34, Transfer of technology; 35, Science for sustainable development; and 40, Information for decision-making.

13. The Conference of the Parties wishes to inform the Commission on Sustainable Development of its intention to take immediate action to:

(1) undertake work on biosafety, establishing an ad hoc working group to consider the needs for and modalities of a protocol to the Convention on this issue; (2) establish a clearing-house mechanism to promote technical and scientific cooperation; (3) facilitate the establishment of the subsidiary body on scientific, technical and technological advice and (4) undertake work relevant to biodiversity related Conventions, other institutional agreements and processes of relevance. The Conference of the Parties would be willing to coordinate and collaborate with other United Nations bodies on further work in these four areas. It would also be desirable that future work on the protection of traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to conservation and sustainable use should be coordinated with the relevant bodies.

14. Given the complementarity of their respective mandates, the Conference of the Parties is convinced it can make a major contribution to the implementation of Agenda 21. Article 23.4 (i) calls upon the Conference of the Parties to consider and undertake any additional action that may be required for the achievement of the purposes of the Convention. Implementation of the Convention will be facilitated by the Conference of the Parties and the Commission on Sustainable Development jointly exploring ways in which any additional issues identified can be further developed within the organizing framework of the Convention.

15. Biological diversity is of great importance for the ecosystem function of forests. The Conference of the Parties emphasizes the importance of conservation, management and sustainable use of forests for achieving the objectives of the Convention and encourages further consideration by the Commission on Sustainable Development on the implementation of the Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of all Types of Forests. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity stands ready to make its own contribution to that process consistent with its role in developing measures to achieve the objectives of the Convention with respect to forests. The Conference of the Parties would welcome a dialogue with the Commission on Sustainable Development and seek dialogue and cooperation with other relevant international organizations on the issue of forests.

16. Desertification is associated with land degradation and entails the loss of biological diversity. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will explore the ways in which it can cooperate with the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification to the extent that their mandates are complementary.

17. The Conference of the Parties invites the Commission on Sustainable Development to:

(a) Urge States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention;

(b) Consider the biodiversity issue in the light of the three interrelated objectives of the Convention;

(c) Approach the subject of biodiversity as a multisectoral issue which is relevant to virtually all of its concerns;

(d) Urge Governments to recognize the mutually supportive relationship between biodiversity and sustainable development;

(e) Encourage Governments to improve coordination among departments at the national level in order to more effectively implement measures for the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components, given the cross-cutting nature of these issues;

(f) Consider the sectoral issues to be addressed at its 1995 session in the context of their close interrelationship with biodiversity;

(g) Urge States to work cooperatively to address the subject of poverty in the context of its close interrelationship with biodiversity;

(h) Stress to Governments the advantages deriving from coordination between its work, that of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and that of other conventions, intergovernmental bodies and fora concerned with the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

18. Given the views and proposals outlined above, the Conference of the Parties believes that the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Convention on Biological Diversity should establish links, through their respective organs and mechanisms, to facilitate a collaborative approach to issues of mutual concern. To this end, the Conference of the Parties will regularly consider the issues to be addressed by the Commission at its future meetings.

19. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity hopes that this statement will be helpful to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

20. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity reaffirms its commitment to caring for the earth and its people.